

Commissioner's UPDATE

News from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection

September — October 2003



A Message from Bradley M. Campbell, Commissioner

This fall, New Jersey voters will have an opportunity to influence the state's growth policies through two proposed constitutional amendments on the ballot.

The first would provide up to \$150 million in additional funding for open space preservation with no new cost to taxpayers. If approved, Governor McGreevey has pledged to dedicate at least \$50 million of this funding to local parks and \$50 million to land acquisition in the Highlands region, which supplies much of our drinking water. The second question would allow funds dedicated to cleaning up underground storage tanks to also be used for the cleanup and redevelopment of brownfields. This proposal would create economic opportunities and reduce development pressure on open space.

In addition, a third ballot question proposes \$200 million in bond funding for lake, dam and flood control projects throughout the state.

Voters frequently lose sight of questions like these on a ballot filled with candidates for public office, but the outcome will help shape the future of our state. I urge you to pay attention to the debate over these proposals and remember to make your voice heard on these issues come Election Day.

Bradley M. Campbell

New Directions for the Green Acres Program

Once again it's back-to-school time. Time for shopping for new school supplies and clothes. Time to start thinking about new teachers and new classes. Just as families are shifting attention to the school year, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection is focusing on students' after-school destinations – parks and playgrounds.

New Jersey is blessed with a vibrant open space preservation program. The Green Acres program was created in 1961 to meet New Jersey's growing recreational and conservation needs. To date, Green Acres has protected more than 500,000 acres of open space and developed hundreds of public parks, bringing the statewide system of preserved open space to more than 1.23 million acres of open space and farmland.

For too long, however, open space acquisitions have shortchanged residents of our densely populated urban and older suburban communities. In the areas where our schoolchildren most need safe, attractive places to play, we have not made parks creation a top priority.

Under Governor James E. McGreevey's leadership, the DEP is seeking to address this oversight while supporting the Governor's smart growth initiatives to revitalize urbanized communities. This summer, DEP Commissioner Bradley M. Campbell issued a policy directive to the Green Acres program, establishing new guidelines for land acquisition priorities.

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*Children from the Voorhees Middle School look on as Governor James E. McGreevey signs Green Acres legislation at an event held at John Connolly Park, Voorhees Township, Camden County.
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Green Acres...

Parks for People

The central component of the directive is a "Parks for People" initiative, allocating additional funding to urban areas. In addition, larger awards will be available as incentives for park development projects in the state's most densely populated municipalities, where land prices are often highest.

As part of this initiative, Green Acres will eliminate funding caps for the demolition of structures to create open space areas in Urban Aid municipalities. Green Acres will also create new incentives for park development projects that are part of the state's Abbott School construction initiative to revitalize schools in underserved districts.

Protecting Our Water Supplies

The new policy directive also establishes other priorities for the Green Acres program that complement Governor McGreevey's environmental initiatives. One of the Governor's highest priorities is the protection of critical water supplies. With more than 50 acres a day of land lost to development, it is vital that we take action now to protect our waterways and the land overlaying our aquifers. Only through a stable supply of water can we continue to provide the quality of life that New Jersey's residents deserve and continue to promote the economic vitality of the state.

Green Acres, under the new directive, will prioritize land purchases that protect the state's water resources and critical plant and wildlife habitat. A new priority ranking system, established through legislation enacted by the Governor, will triple the priority value for water quality and water supply protection, while doubling the priority value of those lands that protect flood-prone areas.

Protecting the Protected

The final aspect of the new policy directive is an effort to ensure that what has already been protected under the Green Acres program stays preserved for future generations to enjoy. The DEP is establishing more stringent measures to prevent existing parkland and open space in communities from being disposed of or diverted.

Current rules limit communities from receiving Green Acres funding to purchase open space or develop parks only to later dispose of existing parkland and open space for non-recreational or conservation purposes. Under the DEP's new measures, any proposals to divert existing open space for needed community projects will have to undergo additional public hearings, earlier in the process. They will also have to provide a higher ratio of replacement land to make up for the diverted open space. In addition, the DEP will seek authority to levy fines and penalties for violating Green Acres funding rules.

Through these more stringent measures and new priorities, Governor McGreevey is ensuring that future generations can continue to enjoy the beautiful natural resources and open space we cherish today.

Governor McGreevey Signs Green Acres Bills

In June, Governor James E. McGreevey signed legislation authorizing the latest round of grants, loans and land purchases under the state's Green Acres Program. These projects will preserve open space and improve parks throughout the state. With this open space funding, New Jersey takes another step in the battle against sprawling development.

The rampant sprawl devouring New Jersey's open space threatens the quality of our natural resources and our environment and the quality of life enjoyed by the citizens of New Jersey. With the state's green spaces rapidly disappearing, the funding provided by these bills allows local governments, non-profits and the state to acquire important properties for preservation.

Among the projects to receive funding is the Crossroads of American Revolution Initiative, which was awarded \$10 million. This initiative preserves historic sites and resources from the Revolutionary War era in New Jersey and is part of a larger effort to promote travel and tourism around the state's Revolutionary War heritage.

Preserved open space protects the quantity and quality of our water supply, sensitive habitats and the state's threatened and endangered species and provides recreational space for residents and visitors to enjoy. To date, Green Acres has protected over half a million acres of open space and developed hundreds of public parks. In conjunction with New Jersey's farmland preservation work and previously established parks, forests, and wildlife management areas, New Jersey's preserved open space now exceeds 1.2 million acres.



Providing parks for people in densely populated areas of the state can improve the quality of life for urban residents. It is one of many steps DEP is taking to help combat sprawling development.

Take a Virtual Tour of New Jersey's State Parks and Historic Sites

Thanks to new online videos, photo galleries and panoramic iPix images, visitors can now explore the scenic sites of New Jersey's state parks, forests and historic sites by simply logging on to the Internet and visiting the DEP homepage at www.nj.gov/dep.

The new virtual tours of beaches, rivers, trails, camping areas and historic homes provide individuals an added opportunity to enjoy some of New Jersey's greatest attractions online. The videos and images are useful tools that can help families or individuals find the perfect location for a day trip or find a scenic area for overnight camping.

Virtual tours are currently available for 27 state park and historic sites.



The Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park is one of many sites you can now explore on DEP's website.

Celebrating 100 Years of State Historic Site Stewardship

A century ago our nation began to recognize the importance of public stewardship of our historic and natural treasures. New Jersey was at the forefront of this movement. The legacy began in 1903 with the purchase of the Indian King Tavern in Haddonfield, Camden County, thus preserving New Jersey's first historic landmark for its citizens.

The Indian King Tavern served as a meeting place for the state's General Assembly when battles of the American Revolution forced legislators to relocate from Trenton. It was here where the Assembly met in 1777 and ordered that the word "State" be inserted for the word "Colony" in all future public documents. The tavern was also where the Declaration of Independence was officially read into the minutes of the New Jersey Assembly.

In honor of this milestone, the DEP is celebrating the centennial of New Jersey's state historic sites through a yearlong campaign to promote their preservation, maintenance and interpretation.

Today the DEP administers the largest historical museum organization in the state with 57 historic sites and districts, 24,000 museum objects and 68,000 archaeological artifacts. These historic resources span the 15th through 20th centuries and include Lenape Native American lands, Revolutionary War battlefields, lighthouses, a presidential birthplace, the home of Walt Whitman and five historic villages.

Encouraging citizens to rediscover and enjoy the state's historic sites, Governor McGreevey signed a proclamation recognizing June 15, 2003 through 2004 as the "Centennial Year of New Jersey's Historic Sites."

As part of the yearlong celebration of the centennial, the DEP will highlight a historic site each month on the DEP homepage, launch a historical lecture series at DEP historic sites statewide, and release special commemorative items for sale, including a new historical postcard collection.

World Water Monitoring Day, October 18th

"A global educational platform for a month's worth of watershed exploration through water testing."

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
Office of the Commissioner
401 East State Street
P.O. Box 402
Trenton, NJ 08625-0402

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Constitutional Amendments on November Ballot Would Help State Battle Sprawl

Come November, New Jersey voters will decide the fate of two proposed constitutional amendments that could dramatically affect the future of our state's open space, precious natural resources, and the quality of life we all treasure.

Voter approval of the Public Questions No. 1 and No. 2 would accelerate preservation of open space and farmlands, protect and conserve critical natural resources, spur redevelopment and revitalization of cities and towns, and make New Jersey's communities more desirable, healthier places to live, work and raise families.

Embodying the key principles of smart growth, these two ballot questions are the result of legislative action Gov. James E. McGreevey initiated earlier this year to implement the anti-sprawl agenda he outlined in his State of the State address last January.

One ballot question proposes increasing the bonding capacity of the Garden State Preservation Trust to \$1.15 billion from \$1 billion to raise revenue for open space, farmland and historic preservation. Without additional cost to the state, this constitutional amendment would make available up to \$150 million more in bond funding to acquire and protect precious open space in New Jersey's northwestern Highlands region and to create and enhance local parks in our urban and older suburban communities.

With its rolling hills, forests, farmland, lakes, reservoirs and streams, the Highlands is widely regarded as a national treasure, and contributes immensely to our quality of life. The Highlands' high-quality water resources provide one third of New Jersey's drinking water. This precious land, however, is increasingly at risk of being consumed by sprawl, and we must take action to protect it while we still can.

The other ballot proposition would establish a reliable, long-term

funding source to clean up and redevelop tracts of land where redevelopment has been hindered due to contamination or fear of contamination. This initiative would make more money available for loans and grants to redevelop these sites, known as brownfields. Approximately \$50 million would become available in the first year alone.

Without increasing taxes, the proposed constitutional amendment would expand the authorized uses of a portion of the annual revenue generated by the Corporate Business Tax. The money would be used to provide municipalities funding from the Hazardous Discharge Site Remediation Fund for brownfields investigation and remediation work. The proposal would allow half of the surplus funds – currently at about \$100 million – accumulated in the existing underground storage tank program to be used for brownfields cleanup and redevelopment.

Brownfields reuse is an essential smart-growth tool. It preserves open space; in fact, every acre of brownfield redevelopment spares 4.5 acres of pristine land from development. Further, bringing brownfields back to life protects the environment, revitalizes neighborhoods, boosts local tax revenue, creates jobs and improves our quality of life.

As Election Day on Nov. 4 draws nearer, you can play an important role in helping other voters learn more about the importance of these smart-growth ballot proposals.

Send address changes to:
NJDEP
Office of Communications
PO Box 402
Trenton, NJ 08625-0402